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AUTHOR Gordon, Rick
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the problems encountered in applying rational and participatory models to school reform and presents an alternative model based on action research. The group processes of a school-improvement team (SIT) at a high school are examined. Data were collected through participant observation, interviews with three faculty members, informal discussions with SIT members, and document analysis. Despite the expressed willingness of teachers to pursue different practices, little progress was made. The lack of progress was rooted in two inherent institutional factors--limited time and divergent viewpoints held by actors in the policymaking process. Findings reflected the limitations of both hierarchical and participatory models of school reform, which fail to recognize the limitations of the decision-making process. A modest proposal for pragmatic policy formation, based on action research, is offered. Action research allows teachers to identify problems and provides them with resources to instigate change within the constraints of their school context. Outcomes include increased teacher autonomy and professional growth. (Contains 56 references.) (LMI)

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THE IRRATIONAL SCIENCE OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Rick Gordon
School of Education
University of Colorado-Boulder
Boulder, Colorado, 80309

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THE IRRATIONAL SCIENCE OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Introduction

When analyzing educational reform efforts, the argument is often made that "the more things change, the more they remain the same" (Sarason, 1971). Despite a wealth of reform efforts throughout educational history, educational practices seem not all that different from earlier times (Cuban, 1984, Sirotnik, 1983, Goodlad, 1983). While the static nature of educational delivery is often presented as a surprising or distressing finding, the surprise is less that reform efforts are so ineffective than that similar processes of effecting change persist in the face of these continual failures. When we look at the disjunction between how change is planned in theory, and what occurs in practice, these frustrating results become more understandable.

Based on literature on organizational theory and the conditions of schooling and teachers' work, the past failures of "top-down" educational reform are not surprising. The realities of schooling do not conform to the assumptions of "rational," hierarchical organizational models and hence these efforts produce little significant change. In response to these "failures" of educational reform, recent emphasis has turned to more participatory forms of school change, attempting to decentralize authority to give more decision making control at the individual school site. Disappointingly, as this study demonstrates, these new arrangements may not prove any more promising for change. In practice, similar

structural realities of schooling constrain the possibilities for change even in participatory models of change.

In this paper, I will first discuss the principles of hierarchical organizational change and its shortcomings, followed by introducing principles of the more recently advocated models of participatory, site based management. The body of the paper will present research on a school improvement team working under these latter principles and how this process showed little progress towards school improvement. The paper concludes with a modest proposal for some directions educators might explore as a more pragmatic approach to school reform.

Rational Models of Organizational Change

> What may be wrong with the rational model is that those who are attempting to change or control schools by reference to it are implicitly basing their actions on a set of assumptions that may be different from the assumptions, opinions, and theories under which the schools actually operate. (Wise, 1979, p.78)

For the better part of this century, it has been felt that the application of scientific principles to organizational management offered unparalleled promise for effective and efficient policy making (Weber, 1949, Callahan, 1965, Sirotnik and Clark, 1988, Wise 1979). In this model of "technical rationality," organizational change is expected to occur through the rational, scientific process of research, program design by "experts," policy directives from authoritative policy makers, compliant (even enthusiastic) implementation by subordinates, and evaluation monitored by administrative authorities (Schon, 1983). In essence, the principles of technical rationality promised, finally, delivery of "the one best

system" not only in education, but in the management of all organizations in our society (Callahan, 1965).

The theoretical elegance of these rational models makes them attractive for their coherence, simplicity, objectivity, and promise for success. These models, as originally conceived, describe ideal scenarios- the way things are supposed to work, a goal for which to strive. Rational choice models are intended for uncomplicated situations in which the problem to be addressed is clearly identified, measured, and articulated; the consequences of possible solutions are known; organizational rules are stable, exhaustive and learnable; knowledge is firmly bounded, scientific, and standardized; goals are unambiguous; and institutional contexts are stable (Schon, 1983). Unfortunately, these "rational" principles of reform are based on assumptions about predictable organizational structures which ignore the realities of American public schooling.

Organizations are beset by the limitations of individuals as well as the difficulties of coordinating potentially disparate interests within the organization. Faced with organizational politics, inadequate goal definition, and "chaotic" internal and external conditions (Peters, 1987), the route from policy development to adoption to implementation is fraught with obstacles to rational action from the organizational standpoint. (In practice, given competing organizational and individual interests, it may well be rational for an individual to actively subvert organizational goals.) Organizations in action cannot act with complete rationality, and thus, policy objectives are rarely realized in practice.

Despite these observed shortcomings of rational policy theory, educational policy making, all too often, follows a traditional rational systems approach (Olson and Eaton, 1987). When applied to teaching, this approach relies on assumptions which are unrealistic in practice. Rational control expects:

> *that students are sufficiently standardized that they will respond in identical and predictable ways to the "treatments" devised by policy makers and their principal agents;
>
> *that sufficient knowledge of which treatment should be prescribed is both available and generalizable to all educational circumstances;
>
> *that this knowledge can be translated into standardized rules for practice; these can be operationalized through regulations and reporting and inspection systems; and
>
> *that administrators and teachers can and will faithfully implement the prescriptions for practice thus devised and transmitted to schools. (Darling-Hammond, 1988, p. 11)

The rational model of school change assumes a direct link between the development of policy objectives, their translation into programmatic detail, and their successful implementation in the school setting. The practical circumstances of public schooling confront each of the above assumptions.

Schools face uncertainty and complexity at each stage in the policy making process. Three characteristics of public schooling diverge significantly from the assumptions of technical rationality in policy making. First, the political organization of educational policy making grants legitimacy to almost all interested parties and is subject to the tenuous nature of direct democratic control (Chubb and Moe, 1990). Second, the "open" configuration of individual

schools with its "loose coupling" of actors makes hierarchical oversight and control difficult (Weick, 1976). Finally, the dynamic classroom environment faced by teachers lacking a well defined teaching technology offers few clear guidelines for practice or assurance of outcomes (Jackson, 1968, Lortie, 1975, Doyle and Ponder, 1978). The combination of this complexity at each level of the policy process undermines efforts for "rational" school reform with the results that "schooling appears pretty much the way it has always been" (Cuban, 1988).

For public education, faced with an uncertain, complex environment subject to multiple actors and multiple points of access in which planned change can be undermined, ignored, altered, or resisted, the rationality of "rational" change is more than problematic. In fact, the continued faith in the promise of hierarchical management seems downright crazy and demands new models of school reform. In response to the perceived failures of rational control, more participatory models of organizational management have evolved. How effective these will be in public schools remains to be seen.

Participatory Management

To respond to complexity and uncertainty, organizational theorists suggest delegating responsibilities to sub-units closer to the delivery of services (Thompson, 1967). This structure divides problems into more manageable forms, and affords authority to those closest to, and hence most knowledgeable of, the challenges of delivery. Following these ideas, participatory management is seen as a vehicle for drawing on the expertise of actors below the managerial

level of the organizational hierarchy. Through participation of these actors, it is expected that decisions will better reflect the perspectives and contexts of those "on the front lines" and thereby increase commitment and effectiveness in meeting policy objectives.

While these principles have proven effective in many organizational settings (Peters and Waterman, 1982), they may not address the challenges of schooling which have undermined more hierarchical efforts at reform and thus may face similarly disappointing results. After introducing the guiding principles of participatory management, I will explain how this model may fail to address the problems confronting hierarchical control. In practice, participatory management may prove no more "rational" for schools than previous organizational theories of change.

Recent research on organizational behavior has acknowledged that successful implementation of any policy directive ultimately depends upon the implementers (Berman and McLaughlin, 1978, Elmore, 1978). In the case of schooling, teachers are most commonly those responsible for the delivery of services proposed by policymakers. All too often, these essential actors are ignored in the reform equation.

Because of their central location in the delivery of educational services, teachers have the ability, which they frequently exercise, to obstruct change in their schools. To effect significant reform in American schooling, teachers' support must be encouraged and cultivated. To enlist this support, reformers must recognize the conditions and contexts of schooling which act as constraints on

teachers and determine, to a large degree, their reaction to proposals for change.

Recent research on the conditions of teachers' work conceptualizes teaching as a "nonroutine technology that relies on teacher judgement and expertise for its success" (Rowan, 1990, p. 357). As teachers confront complex contexts in their work, they are called upon to make thousands of decisions daily (Jackson, 1968). Under these conditions, it is unlikely anyone outside the classroom could plan and coordinate all these decisions. As a result, advocates of participatory management advise delegating substantial control to those who carry out policies, in this case teachers, to apply their professional judgement as they confront the demands of the classroom.

In an effort to include teachers in the decision making process, more decentralized, participatory models of school management have been espoused for schools which recognize teachers "as essential elements in the school management and school improvement process" (Futrell, 1988, p. 375). Through participatory decision making, greater autonomy for teachers, and enhanced models of professionalism (Carnegie Report, 1986) , it is hoped that "teachers will be more motivated to do what they know how to do, teachers will be able to do better the things they know how to do, or the opportunities for peer and administrative support will allow teachers to improve their competence" (Hawley, 1988, p. 427).

Participatory management seeks to "replace hierarchical structures with network structures of decision making in schools. In this approach, teachers would assume expanded authority in schools,

collegial patterns of interaction would be nurtured so that information and advice about teaching could be shared more frequently, and teamwork would be used as an integrative device for the school" (Rowan, 1990, p. 357). This model recognizes that "participation can have a direct impact on organizational effectiveness" by drawing on "the knowledge, skills, and opinions that employees can bring to organizational decision making" (Conley, Schmiddle, and Shedd, 1988, p. 261).

Conley, et al.(1988) note that teachers "are the only school employees with direct, ongoing contact with students. They are thus a school system's primary reservoir of organizational knowledge about means and ends" (p. 263). Furthermore, teachers make decisions over what policies to implement and thus further control the delivery of services. By encouraging teacher participation in school decisions, the organization benefits from direct access to the information teachers hold and greater commitment by teachers to resulting policies. Rather than using managerial control to "assure" effective teaching practices, this model relies on the development of teacher commitment to improve instruction (Rosenholtz, 1987, Firestone and Rosenblum, 1988). "Enhanced opportunities for authority, variety, autonomy, and collegiality" (Rowan, 1990, p. 373) which are characteristic of participatory management have been found to increase worker commitment in private sector organizations, and similar results have been evidenced in schools (Hart, 1990, Rosenholtz, 1987).

Despite the promise of participatory models to improve teaching practice, the practical implications of these models are

relatively unknown. To return to the three characteristics of public schooling which undermine efforts at hierarchical control, in theory participatory management addresses each to some degree. Politically, teachers are accorded a more central role in decision making. The open configuration of schools is less problematic as increased teacher commitment to policy decisions reduces the need for administrative oversight to assure compliance. Finally, teachers are expected to have more control and autonomy to use their expertise to respond to the dynamic classroom environment. Here again, the theoretical ideals are difficult to realize in practice.

Simply altering policy making structures without changing the conditions and status of teachers' work might not sufficiently "empower" teachers as predicted. Although teacher participation in decision making can be encouraged, and even mandated, their commitment to this process is not assured. Many teachers may not desire to participate in policy making, particularly if this detracts from their central mission of working with students (Lortie, 1975). Furthermore, if teachers' voices in the policy making arena are merely one among many, they are unlikely to hold the power to effect results reflective of their experience. Unlike private sector organizations, public schools must respond to direct democratic control, thereby limiting the importance of teacher participation in participatory management. Finally, if teacher participation fails to result in policies reflective of teacher expertise, problems with compliance similar to those in the past will result.

To have meaning, participatory management demands an allocation of real authority to participants, namely teachers, which

schools may not be able to offer. Unless participation results in policy outcomes teachers support, in practice participatory management ultimately may be hierarchical control in a new suit- adding the luster of (limited) teacher input to the core of policy making in which teachers must implement policies handed down by others. The results of an ethnographic study of school improvement will show how, even in what was intended as a participatory model, contextual factors surrounding the policy making process constrain the ability of schools to reform practice.

Methods

Background

This study focussed on the school improvement team (SIT) at Lewis High School (LHS) (all names of places and people in this study are pseudonyms). The institutional basis for SITs should be recognized because this contributes to the opportunities and outcomes for reform through this process. SITs were legislatively mandated as a response to the education reports of the 1980's and are required at each individual school to bring together parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community representatives to assess school needs, develop long range goals and objectives, and to advise the school leadership in its improvement efforts. In addition to requirements of membership, the state requires the school to develop a school improvement plan which must have measurable goals, objectives, timelines, and persons responsible for action. Because of accreditation timing, this plan must be developed by December and progress towards each goal must be demonstrated by

the following August. These requirements from the state impose a structure on SITs which greatly influence their configuration, responsibilities, and possibilities for action.

There were approximately 25 SIT members at LHS (the number is unclear because meetings were open to the public and new attendees often took the same role as long term members). Of those who regularly attended meetings, there were 2 school administrators, 2 counselors, 9 teachers, 8 parents, and 6 students. The selection process for SIT members was informal, with most of the members being invited or appointed on primarily a volunteer basis. In selecting community members, a conscious decision was made to include diverse viewpoints, especially those that were vocal in their opinions on school practices. By inviting these people into the SIT process, it was felt that they would add ferment to discussion and would be less critical of the outcomes of the school improvement process. Thus, the SIT members were not necessarily representative of any specific constituencies, but rather, reflective of certain populations in the school community. Ultimately, the diverse views held by SIT members did less to promote exploration of ideas than to create barriers the group was unable to transcend.

Decision making on this SIT was intended to be consensus based, although votes were taken on numerous occasions to signify positions. This confusion over decision making practices reflected one of many procedural questions on which this SIT spent considerable time in their meetings. As I will discuss later, this procedural focus is both a reflection of the limitations of the SIT

process and a strategy to avoid controversy among disparate interests.

The agenda for SIT meetings were set by the committee chair (a parent who was also an elementary school teacher that reluctantly accepted this position despite openly stating she would not be able to devote the required time to this position) in conjunction with the principal and on advisement from any interested SIT members. These agenda were not detailed or specific, and were easily abandoned in the course of a meeting. Rarely did meetings begin promptly, and few members were present at the scheduled meeting time. By contrast, every meeting ended precisely when scheduled. Anybody attending a meeting would sit around a large oval of pushed together tables and participation in discussion generally followed recognition by the chair, although this rule was not always strictly enforced.

Setting

LHS serves approximately 1,500 students and is located in a city of approximately 100,000 people. Traditionally serving a predominantly Anglo, college bound population, in recent years LHS has found itself faced with an increasingly ethnically diverse student population, embarassingly low graduation rates (75%), and the addition of ninth grade caused by district grade reconfiguration. These factors, combined with a recently hired superintendent committed to school reform and site based management and a new principal whose participatory management style is in sharp contrast to previous, more autocratic school leaders, made for a promising study of the school reform process.

Lewis High School is typified by the low turnover rate for its faculty which has resulted in a very experienced faculty well versed in the dynamics of the local community and the school's response to changing social conditions. Lewis County is a relatively well educated and wealthy community which has traditionally supported local school bonds and just last year approved a levy to raise an additional 7 million dollars to avoid cutbacks for local schools.

The recent grade reconfiguration inspired unparalleled local debate and controversy, with a visible group of local professionals leading the opposition to the change from junior high to middle school principles. As will be discussed below, this controversy both shapes and reflects the actions for the high school SIT team, involving some of the same issues and personalities, and certainly mirroring some of the same dynamics.

Data Collection and Analysis

My involvement with the LHS SIT consisted of participant observation at eight of their ten monthly two-hour meetings and at one joint SIT-faculty meeting, formal interviews with three faculty SIT members, and several shorter, informal discussions with SIT members. I also collected all documents received by SIT members, and living in the same community, was familiar with local media coverage of school issues. Finally, I had supervised student teachers at LHS and thus had some familiarity with the school culture before entering into this site.

I kept detailed fieldnotes from each meeting, along with a personal journal reflecting on my experience. Formal interviews were transcribed verbatim, and informal interviews were recorded

with fieldnotes during and immediately following discussion. On each data source, I employed two methods of analysis; first, assertion analysis, as discussed by Erickson (1986), and second, vignette analysis as proposed by Van Mannen (1988). These analyses followed a recursive process between data collection and analysis, constantly seeking disconfirming evidence which may invalidate conclusions I developed.

Findings

The results of this study reflected the problems with both hierarchical and participatory models of school reform. The complexity of the school environment and the political process created challenges which the Lewis High SIT could not overcome. Despite the expressed willingness on the part of teachers to pursue different practices, little significant progress was made through this school improvement process. This lack of progress, it seems, was rooted in two very powerful and problematic institutional factors inherent in virtually every school- limited time and different viewpoints held by actors in the policy making process. These two factors undermine efforts at reform, whether the school adopts hierarchical or participatory organizational models.

Time

Participatory decision making, it must be recognized, is time and energy consuming. These two precious commodities are far from abundant in most school settings (Boyer, 1983). Given the other time demands for all SIT members, but especially the teachers, the opportunities for effective SIT action were tightly circumscribed.

This factor proved the most significant determinant of the lack of progress at Lewis High.

Unfortunately, this SIT process is far from ideal. In addition to the desire to establish long range goals and vision, SIT is responsible for meeting other state requirements including school and committee accountability reports and development of specific annual goals and objectives. To meet these requirements, the initial five meetings were devoted to committee organization (selecting a chairperson, arranging meeting times, discussing voting procedures, and clarifying by-laws- issues which arose again, some several times, at later meetings) and approval of the four annual planning priorities.

All this work occurred while the school was moving ahead with another busy year, including designing the transition to the four year high school. While SIT pushed to meet pressing state requirements, long range "decisions were being made by not being made," and the group struggled to define the long range vision which they realized should guide their more short term directives. The principal, Jerrie Carlson, expressed the challenge the whole SIT team felt, "It would be nice to start with the huge and work down, but we haven't been able to do that because of the time... If we could have had a whole year off, maybe we wouldn't have floundered (with the annual planning priorities)."

This, however, is the reality of school policy making and change- new perspectives must be developed while immersed in the old; already overloaded schedules must somehow accommodate additional responsibilities and transition to new concepts and practices. Innovation and change is difficult even when an

organization has slack resources and when the change is not "costly" (in time and energy) for the individuals involved (House, 1974). For overburdened teachers facing a typical day best described as "chaotic," the costs of change might well be excessive.

Time constraints were also evident in the poor attendance record of SIT members. While every SIT member seemed committed to the their service on this committee, there was not one member who was able to attend every meeting from start to finish. Even the chairperson was absent for three of the eight meetings I observed. At the scheduled starting time, rarely were more than a handful of people present. Another ten or so would arrive, appearing rushed, in the first ten minutes of the scheduled meeting and another 5 to 10 would straggle in throughout the first hour. Inevitably, several people would have to leave quietly during the second hour. In addition, from 5 to 10 SIT members were absent from any given meeting. The constant fluctuation of attendance made it difficult to establish a sense of group cohesion, and more importantly, to have the shared time required to establish long range goals.

For all group members, their commitment to SIT seemed less constrained by desire than by outside time demands. Student members, who had an especially difficult time with attendance, frequently were faced with conflicts of other school events. Community members seemed pressed to arrange their work or family schedules around the meeting times. School personnel, while free from formal work responsibilities at meeting times, confronted the demands of their daily classes, other school committee work, extracurricular supervision, and family commitments. George Mason,

school band director, was forced to miss or leave early from several meetings for band rehearsals or performances. Another member, Kathy Reynolds, teaches five different classes a day, serves on four committees, takes a graduate course, and raises three elementary school students. Her typical day, she explains,

> It's just nuts. It's like, you're trying to do, obviously teaching is the main thing you're trying to do and you have all these people who need help and you have all these students coming in and asking you for makeup work because our attendance is not good and so that's constantly going on and around that I'm a person who happens to participate a whole lot and I have all kinds of meetings and other agendas. This year with site based management and doing my internship and leading some committees for that, it's doubly crazy. It's just, you know, to teach five classes a day, 150 people run through your life with all their needs and on top of all that to be on 4 or 5 committees with agendas, with things to produce and actually, you know, it's just nuts.

Given the quantity of teachers' responsibilities, it seems unrealistic to expect their commitment to the SIT process to reach much beyond the confines of the meetings themselves.

Amidst this hectic schedule, it is difficult to squeeze in the time needed, as expressed by the school principal, to "develop, determine, and believe in commonly held values." In practice, the process of trying to involve the faculty in a more collegial culture is undermined by this ever present time constraint. As Kathy Reynolds observes about the faculty in-service designed to begin this transformation,

> There is virtually no time when we come together and sit around and talk. We have virtually no time for that because our time is so structured. You saw how we work on a task that we were really rushed to finish, have five minutes to grab a cup of coffee or go to the bathroom and boom, there's the next task...We had a whole afternoon of meetings to plan things and

> get a lot of work done, and that was as much time as we could spend.

An experienced social studies teacher, Gary Ellis, echoes the debilitating effects of this time crunch, commenting,

> We have an in-service day and Jerrie will run us through something really quickly, a brainstorming session, that's all we had time to do. That really bothered everybody. People felt bad about that, but that's the way we are treated. Do that task today, we got that much time, do that task. Oops, time's up. Whoosh! Whatever we did gets passed on. It's kind of like, shit, that's no good. So I think everybody gets frustrated by that.

Given the structural imperatives of teachers' work- a day filled with students, classes, decisions, meetings, grading, paperwork, and an over-filled schedule, the time and energy needed to undertake the demanding change process simply may not be available.

Divergent Views

The second major constraint on the progress of SIT were the divergent viewpoints held by SIT members, especially between those of faculty and community members. These conflicts reflect established patterns of distrust between hard-working, under-appreciated faculty and critical public opinion expressed through "education bashing" newspaper articles, letters, and statements at school meetings. These differing perspectives had two major effects: skepticism by SIT members about their potential effectiveness and avoidance of conflict. Together, these conditions contributed to lack of progress by SIT and frustration for its members.

The teachers at LHS, like many throughout the country, are leery of control from above. A long history of criticism (especially evident in the local media), ever increasing responsibilities for solving problems whose causes reside largely outside the schools,

and continually inadequate resources have frustrated many teachers. There is a deep sense of skepticism among teachers who have seen reform efforts and reform agents come and go. As one teacher observes, "We've been handed things down forever in education. I think a lot of people feel apprehensive and don't trust the process. People have always told them (teachers) what to do. If they (the teachers) come up with something, someone (a policy maker) will say forget it, we're doing it this way. So I think there's a lot of mistrust. It's happened so many times in the past."

The powerless position of teachers is reflected by The Carnegie Forum's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, which concludes,

> Teachers work in an environment suffused with bureaucracy. Rules made by others govern their behavior at every turn...Teachers are treated as if they have no expertise worth having. Teachers who choose to work together as professional colleagues must constantly fight the natural tendencies of a system based on very different principles. And an endless array of policies succeed in constraining the exercise of the teacher's independent judgment on almost every matter of moment. (Carnegie Report, 1986, p. 47)

This lack of control is a sensitive issue for teachers, as the faculty union representative on SIT often recognized. At an early meeting, she explained, "There is discomfort and misunderstanding among the faculty as to what the SIT group is doing. Will they do something to us without representation and without our input?" Because of the very personal nature of teaching (Duffy and Roehler, 1986), change may be seen as threatening not only established patterns, but as openly critical of individual teacher's practice. In a culture typified by norms of equality and cordiality (Lortie, 1975,

Hart, 1990), these threats can easily undermine the trust needed to undertake risk and change.

It is well recognized at Lewis High that for policies to be effective, teacher support is imperative. Principal Carlson elaborates, "Faculty are principals in carrying out what we (SIT) are developing. We can't develop goals unless the faculty is with us." To the faculty, she advises, "Outcomes cannot be achieved without total faculty commitment." With the long established patterns of control and resulting faculty sensitivity to imposition of policies from outside, it is difficult for the SIT process to overcome this distrust.

The idea that teachers would exercise increased decision making authority did not sit well with other competing interests. In the case of Lewis High, the conflict between the views of some of the community members and some teachers was exacerbated by an underlying and mutual sense of distrust between parents and teachers. Kathy Reynolds explains, "The parents are already feeling that the teachers have called too many shots and the teachers feel they are being told what to do by the parents... I think there's a lot of kind of paranoia right now, about being held accountable and being under the gun to produce results that we may not have the resources to produce." Gary Ellis agrees,

> I think there is a tremendous lack of trust on the part of parents in the school district and there's a lack of trust for a lot of teachers in the school district...There's a sense of rivalry on the SIT team so that when we try to make a decision, no one can even agree on what they're deciding on. It's so competitive and mutually disruptive that I'm not sure this particular group of people will ever be an effective SIT team. It's like if you said the sky is blue, there would be people who would want to argue that to the death just because they aren't going to agree with anything you say.

From the perspective of teachers on SIT, a few parent and community members are seen as obstructing the progress of the group. Kathy Reynolds observes, "You sort of know certain people have certain positions or axes to grind maybe...Anything that is a little bit different from the way it was 30 years ago is perceived as railroading us towards mediocrity, that's going to do it, we're going down the tubes." More forcefully, Gary Ellis complains,

> We have some special interest groups that are represented there...It was almost comical the other night. Mrs. Sanders sitting there with her sneer, her curled lip sneer. Telling Jerrie Carlson the surveys she did were absolutely worthless. She hadn't seen them, she had no idea what been asked but if Jerrie Carlson did them, it was worthless, it was no good...She wants to argue for the sake of arguing. She wants to be negative for the sake of being negative. I don't have much use for it. She is a very intelligent lady, but she is so angry, she can't help us out.

Cognizant of these oppositional individuals, the SIT group has had difficulty establishing direction. Kathy Reynolds explains,

> I would say there are a lot of different constituencies and and they're each representing their own viewpoint and we're trying to communicate about it and sometimes it's frustrating because nobody knows exactly what or we don't agree on the direction. We aren't even really sure, we haven't really clearly delineated the problems even, or we don't all buy into the problems. Like some people are saying, so what if we have a high dropout rate, there's always kids who dropout, who cares? I mean there not saying it quite like that, but really that's some peoples' feeling and that's the frustration of it.

Mirroring this sentiment, Gary Ellis observes, "That lack of moving towards that beacon, towards that lighthouse; either the lights have turned out or we're on the wrong coast cause there's no lighthouse. (Laughs) We can't even see where we're headed. It could be the rocks, I don't know." Certain of running aground if disagreements

are brought out into the open, the SIT team seems to content itself with diversions which avoid the confrontations which would ensue in the process of doing the hard work of developing long range plans.

This fear of conflict is not entirely unfounded. The year started out with more open discussion, but this quickly devolved into conflict. As Gary Ellis told me,

> What's really interesting, when we started this group off, we started fighting right there. Here we are at the country club and we lay out the 9 principles of education based on the IDEA model. Right away, see, there are people there who view IDEA as virtually a communist plot. The most dangerous organization in the history of the world. Those people immediately hit the panic button. (Squawks the following) "I've seen this before, I know what this is!" You know its just something to talk about, we couldn't even talk about these things. Nine principles of education, they refused to talk about them. "We're going to make up our own minds." That's the sort of dynamics we had right from the very beginning. So you know, Jean and I were looking at each other saying "Uh oh, what have we got here?" It's not a healthy group. If we can't get off of where we're at here, I don't see any point in being on that committee.

Having established this "sick dynamic" from the start, the remainder of the year's meetings, it seemed, were characterized by avoiding conflict at all costs, including the cost of not fulfilling SIT's assigned responsibility. With several SIT members so critical and prejudiced against almost any mention of change, interactions at the meetings threaten to either be terribly antagonistic or avoid issues that would bring latent disagreements to the surface. In the case of the Lewis High School SIT, the latter seems to be the more prevalent norm.

To avoid conflict, the SIT team adopted several tactics. One teacher observes, "It seems like we have done just about everything we can to avoid making a decision." By bringing in outside speakers,

asking for more information, discussing meeting times over and over again (although they were set for each semester), a significant amount of meeting time passed without the need to address potentially volatile issues of school direction. Of the meetings I attended, over half devoted at least half the time to procedural topics or learning information disseminated by either the principal or outside speakers brought in for this purpose. For example, one meeting spent the first hour with the principal presenting ideas for the new 9th grade class, dropout preventions and alternative school programs, explaining how the graduation rate is calculated and answering questions about school plans for the coming year. Later meetings brought in an educational research expert and local business leaders to offer their views to the committee. While sharing this information is necessary for the SIT team to have an adequate basis for their decisions, it comes at the expense of time devoted to discussion among members, exploration of ideas, and development of statements of purpose which might lead to developing school goals. Although part of the motivation to devote so much time to information gathering and procedural issues appeared to be the avoidance of conflict, the structure of the committee with its community, parent, and student members demands attention to informing all members on pertinent issues and developing a sense of group cohesion to permit shared decision making to take place. Again, this takes time, but it also requires a certain level of common understandings which this group may not share.

Diversions to other topics or speakers were not the sole means for avoiding conflict. This group maintained the outward appearance

of harmony by following norms of polite, yet subdued discourse, for the most part keeping dissenting viewpoints to oneself (or among sympathetic individuals seated nearby), diffusing contention, and expressing concern to follow the established rule of consensus. Most of the time, individuals were polite and friendly. Upon arrival, members willingly helped set up chairs and tables in their common loosely oval configuration, greeted each other, and sat in seemingly random patterns. The generally acceptable tone of voice used was unemotional and seemingly rational.

It is clear, however, that dissenting views were widely held. It was common to observe side conversations during SIT meetings, and my presence served as an outlet for frustrations, as those sitting nearby shared their observations. When an outside speaker questioned the usefulness of standardized test results, an nearby teacher told me, "He's thrown up the red flag for about four people in this room." After the meeting, another SIT member expressed her frustration with the lack of progress in these meetings, commenting, "I've been coming four months and we haven't gotten anywhere. People are so afraid to take a stand." Despite these feelings, which were seemingly widespread among group members, rarely, if ever were they expressed openly in the meeting. Even when frustrations were expressed in the last meeting, the issue focused on leadership and format of the meeting and failed to confront the underlying differences of viewpoints at the heart of the lack of progress.

This aversion to and avoidance of conflict became an inherently accepted norm in this group. Gary Ellis explained, "It's like everyone knows where the lines are drawn and we just don't bother to cross

them anymore." Lacking the individual initiative, leadership, time, or outside pressure to cross these lines, the SIT process at Lewis High School more often than not resulted in frustration for individuals and lack of progress towards prescribed group goals. Gary Ellis epitomized this frustration, lamenting, "I gotta get off this committee. I gotta get off this committee. I can't stand to see Mrs. Sanders sneering down at Jerrie one more time and the friction that's there. After all the team building stuff, everyone looks like they want to kill each other."

In joining SIT, everyone seemed to express optimism for this vehicle of change which would bring together diverse elements of the educational community to create a more trusting and cooperative avenue for school change. No one, it seems, could foresee the hurdles which must be overcome and the structural impediments which would stand in the way of making the progress all group members believed was possible.

Conclusion and Analysis

Many structural factors constrain the prospects for significant change in schools. The overriding pressures of time pervade the change process and limit individuals' abilities to devote the attention necessary to meet challenging goals. The history of school decision making at this site, like many others, has resulted in a low level of overall trust which makes any change process even more difficult. For the Lewis High School SIT, this problem is exacerbated by the composition of its membership and the difficulty finding adequate leadership. The combination of these factors create the conditions

which shape the interactions within SIT, and ultimately lead to the lack of effective action.

For teachers involved with this process of school improvement, the result of the conflicts within SIT and the limitations of their time and energy led to the "cause without a rebel" phenomenon. Despite awareness of the need for change in school practices, and the desire to work for change, teachers at LHS would not expend what would be extraordinary effort to try to resolve conflict. The history of unsuccessful and transitory reform efforts and a perception of relative powerlessness for teachers results in limited energy to devote to what seems like another futile effort for change. As Olson and Eaton (1987) observe, teachers come to accept existing conditions, because "there is only so much energy to go around" (p. 191). Historically, when teachers face complexity and conflict, Cuban (1984) elaborates, "teachers rationed their energy and time in order to cope with conflicting and multiple demands, constructed certain teaching practices that have emerged as resilient, simple, and efficient solutions in dealing with large numbers of students in a small space for extended periods of time" (p. 242). Teachers on SIT, likewise, managed to cope with conflict and time constraints by avoiding open dissent, thereby retaining existing school practices.

As the school year drew to a close, the SIT team played out its roles by avoiding open confrontation and conflict, realizing that the group lacked the time, energy, or leadership to overcome these patterns. Most SIT members, frustrated by the lack of progress they had made, expressed their intention to resign their positions for the next year. Thus, any experience gained through this trying year of

meetings was unlikely to translate into more effective SIT policymaking in the future. The following year's SIT, it is likely, will undertake similar challenges with the same constraints impinging on their work, and ultimately, produce similarly lackluster results in their efforts to improve the school.

These conditions are not unique to Lewis High School. The overarching issues of time (and energy) constraints and heterogeneous viewpoints affect virtually all public schools in this country. In fact, as schools are asked to address an growing agenda of societal needs and formerly disenfranchised groups become more assertive in their demands for meaningful educational opportunities, both of these challenges will be exacerbated. Neither hierarchical nor participatory models of reform seem able to accomodate these realities.

Whether the model of change is "hierarchical" or "participatory," it seems a foundational belief of policy making is that "rational" decision makers can be brought together to determine some objective vision of improved school practices. For schools, however, there is no simple, "right" solution to the problem of educational quality. "Rational" organizational theory has little room for the uncertainty and complexity which define the school process. In either case, there is a fundamental misunderstanding about rationality which ignores context and individual interests.

Rational choice theory assumes that all actors have perfect information of all possible alternatives and their consequences along with a clearly defined demand preference ordering which allows them to make choices which maximize expected benefits (Downs,

1957, Simon, 1949). Similarly, organizations, with strong leadership, clear and agreed upon goals, regular monitoring of results, and a firmly ordered hierarchy of responsibilities, were thought to be able to take rational action to promote organizational effectiveness (Weber, 1949).

In reality, however, current theory recognizes the limits of individuals and organizations to meet the restrictive requirements of rational choice models. Decision makers have limited ability, time, and resources to clearly identify their preference orderings and more significantly, to evaluate all possible alternatives and their probable consequences (March and Olsen, 1976, Olson, 1971, Simon, 1976, Shulman and Carey, 1985). In practice, decision makers must act under conditions of limited information and uncertainty, maximizing their choices within the limits of their ability to evaluate the potential results of their actions (Shulman and Carey, 1985).

This theory of "bounded rationality" more accurately portrays the decision making processes actors follow to determine their response to policy making opportunities. Within this modern view of rational choice, the conditions which impose the "bounds"- the constraining factors of individual or organizational resources and structural and institutional processes- determine the results of the policy making process.

Traditional, hierarchical models of organizational change have proven unable to recognize these bounds. Participatory models, at least as reflected by the experience at LHS, similarly fail to account for the very real constraints on actors in the policy making process. To acknowledge these bounds, what is needed is a more "pragmatic"

conception of school reform- a theory of policy making based on the realities of the educational system in action. This theory must acknowledge the inevitable complexity and dynamism of schooling which exists in a complex and dynamic society. Regardless of anyone's hopes for easier-to-teach students, more homogeneous school populations, greater parental support, or "better" teachers, the characteristics of individuals involved with education are unlikely to improve significantly in the foreseeable feature. Given these circumstances, and the prognosis for greater challenges resulting from increased numbers of children living in poverty, in single-parent households, and from minority backgrounds (Hodgkinson, 1990), a theory of educational policy making must be developed which is responsive to what works in practice, not just what is elegant in theory. I will conclude this paper with some tentative ideas for directions educators may take to promote more pragmatic policy making.

A Modest Proposal for Pragmatic Policy Making

The question of school change, McLaughlin (1990) contends, is not only a matter of "removing constraints or obstacles which does not by itself ensure more effective practice."(p. 15) Instead, we also must look at the factors which promote changed practice. She explains,

> A focus on enabling practice within the presence of existing constraints highlights the conditional, mutually reinforcing, and contextual nature of factors that support effective teaching... This perspective, which moves from understanding policy implementation to enabling effective practice, underscores the essential contribution of teachers' perspectives as informants and guides to policy. We have learned that we cannot mandate

> what matters to effective practice; the challenge lies in understanding how policy can enable and facilitate it." (p. 15)

In practice, regardless of pronouncements of external agencies, teachers do what they think will work. As the history of school reform demonstrates, "Statements of how change *should* occur are not very useful in interpreting how classroom teachers actually respond to influences which impinge upon their established habits and practices" (Doyle and Ponder, 1978, p.1, my emphasis).

Typically, "schools are viewed as the objects of change, not as centers of change" (Sirotnik and Clark, 1988, p. 660). In the case of Lewis High School, the school improvement process afforded neither the resources nor the structure to allow the school to act as a center for change. The significant resources available in schools both to recognize what needs attention and to respond to these needs goes untapped. Attention needs to be focused within the schools to find change agents who can make a difference. Because of the centrality of teachers to the successful implementation of almost any educational innovation, they must be the focus of pragmatic policy making.

This focus on teachers, however, cannot add more demands to already overstretched individuals or underestimate the task at hand. "Rational" policy making, whether hierarchical or participatory, traditionally has ignored the complexity of school contexts and the limited resources available to address this. Implicit in these policy making models is the assumption of ample resources to accomplish intended actions- an assumption which, in the case of the LHS SIT, proved problematic.

For teachers, the precious commodity of time is rarely in adequate supply to undertake new responsibilities. At LHS, the already inadequate time allocated to the SIT process proved especially burdensome to teachers who added their SIT participation to already full schedules. This challenge was elaborated by Mr. Ellis, who explained, "I could use my time a lot better than this. On the other hand, there are some really critical things there that need to be handled and I ought to have my head in the program there and do what I can do." If people are serious about school reform, providing the time necessary to devote to the change process is imperative; one monthly two hour meeting is unlikely to do the trick.

Schools need to become models of change and adaptation for our society. This means incorporating new knowledge, which is being produced at an increasingly rapid rate, as well as creating the conditions for teachers to take risks and pursue continued professional growth. Classroom situations and curricular knowledge should be viewed as problematic and socially constructed (Zeichner and Liston, 1987). Teachers are continually required to make decisions to adapt to the complex and dynamic conditions created by a particular configuration of students, subject matter, and school demands. Like learning for students, the model for teacher change must recognize this growth as a process without definitive bounds or ends. The objective should be continued growth, not a one-shot directive for improvement.

The "unscientific" process of action research, with its emphasis on "the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation" (Rappaport, 1970, in Wallace, 1987, p. 104), provides a

useful tool for establishing this teacher centered model for school reform. The focus of action research, rather than being methodological purity, is on action oriented, practical results. In contrast to traditional research models predicated upon the creation of findings by academic scholars which are then expected to be implemented by lower in status practitioners (teachers), "action research is regarded as implying a 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' view of teacher development" (Wallace, 1987, p. 107). This approach is not only emancipatory, in the sense that it empowers teachers to take responsibility for their own professional growth (Wood, 1988), but it encourages the development of a shared language (Little, 1983, 1990) and sense of collective action which might potentially transform the conditions of their work (Carlson, 1987).

The action research model emphasizes the dynamic and contextualized nature of schooling. Wallace (1987) explains,

> Action research is the process through which teachers collaborate in evaluating their practice jointly, raising awareness of their personal theory; articulate a shared conception of values; try out new strategies to render the values expressed in their practice more consistent with the educational values they espouse; record their work in a form which is readily available to and understandable by other teachers; and thus develop a shared theory of teaching by researching practice. (Wallace, 1987, p. 105)

Action research is based on a view of change congruent with the conditions of teachers' work. Rather than seeing challenges in their classroom as reflecting personal shortcomings, action research encourages collegial sharing of problems and solutions which are

common to all teachers. This sharing is essential for promoting change, as Richardson (1990) elaborates,

> In fact, teacher empowerment does not occur without reflection and the development of the means to express justifications. Without such empowerment, teachers may become victims of their personal biographies, systematic political demands, and ecological conditions, rather than making use of them in developing and sustaining worthwhile significant change. (p. 16)

A pragmatic approach to school change will allow teachers themselves to identify problems and provide them the resources to undertake the cyclical process of change within the constraints of their practical school contexts. In action research, growth occurs through the process of identifying a problem, "developing a plan of action to improve what is already happening, acting to implement the plan, observing the effects of the action in the context in which it occurs, and reflecting on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent action and so on, through a succession of cycles." (Kemmis, in Wood, 1988, p. 136) Thus, the process of teacher growth is on-going and never-ending, essentially practical in providing direction for immediate action in response to new situations which occur within the context of one's classes. At the same time, action research allows the development of practical knowledge based on the experiences of fellow practitioners whom teachers generally find the most reliable source of useful professional guidance (Smylie, 1990, Bolster, 1983).

Simply providing the tools for change does not promise an unleashing of teacher autonomy. Years of tradition and the conditions of teachers' work lead many teachers to accept their present roles and to view change with skepticism. To undertake new

roles and responsibilities, teachers will need a school culture which both encourages and rewards change, questioning, and flexibility. As with the SIT example, participation in the process of change adds demands on teachers' time and can only be effective by creating conditions conducive to teacher growth.

If school reform is desired, resources must be allocated to relieve teachers of some responsibilities to allow them to pursue opportunities for change. At the same time, a professional culture among teachers must be encouraged by providing opportunities for interaction which breaks patterns of isolation which constrain the teaching profession. Judith Little's (1982) work on school organization demonstrates that characteristics of collegial experimentation and interaction pervade schools more successful at professional improvement. Promoting and sustaining these conditions can support teachers involved in meaningful and lasting change.

At the same time, teachers may need help developing these new skills to develop, evaluate, and implement policies appropriate to their classrooms. For new teachers, some of this training should occur in the process of certification; for current teachers, this will require staff development which is coordinated, long term, and supportive.

Providing greater autonomy for teachers will demand decentralizing power and not only encouraging changed practices, but the willingness to accept failure at times. The likely result of increased teacher responsibility for reform will be the demise of the search for "the one best system" (Tyack, 1974). Ultimately, variation

rather than standardization will be the norm in public education (Lieberman and Miller, 1990). These differences, although in conflict with the generalized models of technical rationality, recognize that not all schools are alike, and instead, are integrally related to the context of their community (Metz, 1988).

While the various factors relating to school change are generally discussed in relative isolation from each other, Lieberman and Miller (1990) advise, "For school restructuring to occur, factors must be present at the same time and over time" (p. 759). It is not sufficient to attempt piecemeal approaches to school change. The experience of the LHS SIT serves as an example of the failures of piecemeal action. The frustrations of one year of futile meetings may undermine efforts to recruit faculty members to SIT in the future and further reinforce beliefs that teachers are powerless in the change process.

Incomplete commitment may undercut otherwise positive steps and fall short of creating the necessary conditions to recruit, train, and retain teachers willing to reflect on school practices and effect change in the classroom. The commitment to providing teachers a central role in the reform process must be unqualified to counteract years of secondary status for the teaching profession and to create the conditions in which teachers are empowered to improve public education.

Rather than following "rational" principles in which an individual applies "expert" knowledge, this pragmatic model recognizes true expertise is unattainable in the complex setting of schools. The best teachers are those who recognize the complexity of

their environment and who are able to adapt to the dynamic conditions they confront in their classrooms. Like constructivist models of student learning, teacher development is based on contextualized knowledge developed for unique configurations of students, settings, and subjects with which the professional teacher works. Teachers can be "reskilled" with a model of continual growth and a school environment which encourages risk-taking and change. This pragmatic approach to school reform may not only reenliven current teachers, but may help attract quality applicants to the field and retain the best of those who enter the profession. Judging by the (in)effectiveness of existing models for reform, it seems only rational to try a different approach.

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